MYDDLETON ANGLING CLUB

The River Wharfe, Ilkley, Yorkshire

Advisory Visit Report Undertaken on behalf of the **The Wild Trout Trust**
By Ron Holloway MIFM

8th May 2002-05-14

The River Wharfe, Ilkley – Illustration One.

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Myddleton Angling Club
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This Advisory Visit was undertaken by Ron Holloway (R H Associates) on behalf of the Wild Trout Trust (WTT) in the company of Humphrey Boyle, Chairman of Myddleton Angling Club, Chris Wilcock, Fishery Management Officer Environment Agency and John Davison, President of the Myddleton Angling Club.

Objective of Visit:

The objective of this advisory visit was to look at the stretch of the River Wharfe comprising the fishery of the M.A.C. The stretch observed runs from the Old Town Bridge upstream to the upper limits at Cocking End and within this reach to pinpoint and identify any problems in the brown trout habitat which may be controlling the natural holding and breeding capacity of the river and to recommend such measures which could be taken by the Club to remedy these problems. Furthermore, to advise on any habitat protection and enhancement work that could be made which would enable the present stocking levels of stew bred brown trout to be reduced or totally discontinued and to suggest a management strategy for the Club to follow which achieves these objectives in order to rely on self sustaining stocks of wild brown trout in the future.

Background:

The M.A.C. was founded in 1896 and in those early days the River Wharfe at Ilkley not only held good stocks of wild brown trout and grayling but also Atlantic salmon were present in large numbers. Water quality deterioration brought about by the heavy industrialisation of the Wharfe catchment wiped out the Atlantic Salmon population for almost one hundred years, but as the heavy industrial pollution decreased, water quality has improved and the Atlantic Salmon are making a comeback in the Wharfe catchment.

Anecdotal evidence obtained from the Environment Agency on recent surveys shows that the water quality on this reach is excellent. The recent invertebrate surveys show a good diversity of aquatic insects though further surveys should be carried out to update this data and confirm the diversity and strengths of the insect families present in the reach.

The stocking policy has been to stock twice each season with 200 takeable size brown trout of a size range between llb.4ozs to 2lbs. Unfortunately, the Club has not kept accurate records of the number of stock trout taken each season, but an estimate of 50% has been suggested.

Wild brown trout do feature in anglers catches, though numbers and size of which are unclear. Anecdotal evidence again suggests that there is a good self sustaining population of wild brown trout with many small trout in the 6" to 8" range and numerous takeable size trout in the 12oz to 1lb 2oz range with the very odd larger wild brown trout being caught.

Personal observation and anecdotal evidence indicates there is a very strong and healthy population of grayling with fish of 3lb plus not uncommon.

The entire reach is adequately protected along each bank from outside influences and there are good relations with the Golf Club on the north bank and with the Tennis Club and other riparian owners of the south bank.

Problem Areas:

Erosion. Recent very high river flows have identified two lengths of river bank that are very susceptible to excessive erosion, both of the following sites require urgent attention. The indications are that given any high flows, serious land loss and possible structural damage to adjacent buildings may occur if flood protection work is not implemented.

Site One: At the rear of the Tennis Club Courts – Illustration Two. The protection work recently carried out has protected the land directly behind this new structure but due to its morphology (shape) it has inadvertently created a major problem just downstream of the structure by encouraging a back eddy to form which has already caused considerable erosion in the area directly behind the grey building. (See area indicated by letter A in Illustration No.2) Serious consideration should be given to protecting this vulnerable bank from further erosion which could threaten the structure of the grey building, particularly in any above normal high flows.

Illustration Two.

Site Two – Upstream of Tennis Courts. The protection work recently carried out has protected the land directly behind but its upstream limit has, and is, encouraging the river at any level to erode the unprotected bank upstream and also the indications are that the river will erode behind the upstream end of the new construction (see A in Illustration No.3)

Illustration Three.

Consideration should be given to protecting this very vulnerable bank by extending the work upstream and by deflecting the current away from the foot of this soft bank. Large rock riprap could be considered as illustrated. However, larger rock than illustrated should be used. There will, however, be problems with planning and conservation consents as sandmartins have now colonised the face of this bank.

Site Three: Hawksworth Island.

The area behind the sheet piling is very vulnerable to further erosion at high flows and any further erosion could seriously compromise the golfing area of the island. Any remediation will be expensive and will require expertise from a fluvial geomorphologist who will be able to recommend and design a suitable structure to prevent further serious damage. Consideration could, however, be given to the importation of big rocks to back fill the entire area behind the damaged piling and for this to be re-profiled back, as illustrated (Illustration No.4.). When sufficient rock has been placed consider removing the damaged piles. Part of the rockfill could be

infilled with gravel and soil and replanted. However, it is advisable to take professional civil engineering advice on this site.

Illustration Four.

Trout Habitat Enhancement: Little Water / Back of Island.

This reach, which runs round the back of Hawksworth Island has excellent wild trout holding potential. To improve this capacity it is suggested that a double rock structure be placed on the shallow riffle – this to be built of rocks of sufficient size which will withstand high seasonal flows (Illustration No.5).

Illustration Five.

The shape of the constructions will scour a trout holding area just downstream. The rock used in the illustration may be on the small side but were all that was available but it gives some idea of the shape. It is suggested you consult with the EA on the precise siting of these structures. Fishing access may be improved with some judicious pruning of overhanging branches, otherwise this stream is a perfect example of quality trout habitat.

Sagar's Flat.

This wide, shallow, featureless stretch needs livening up with some randomly placed clusters of rocks throughout the entire area. The placement of these clusters will not only create excellent trout holding areas but will also produce more surface activity into the stretch and generate more energy into the flow which will help to keep sediments on the move and, therefore, maintain a cleaner river bed.

Illustration Six.

These clusters of rock should be placed to be just below the surface at mean base flow heights and be substantial enough to withstand any high winter flows. Random placing of rock clusters – see Illustration No.6.

General Comments and Suggestions:

The general condition of the wild trout habitat throughout the fishery observed, is excellent with little or no major problems for wild trout at all life stages. Recent EA invertebrate studies show (anecdotal) that insect life is good with a wide range of insect families present. Electro fishing surveys show excellent wild brown trout survival through to adult stages. Apart from the two serious erosion problems that,

fortunately, should not have any serious detrimental effects on fish and fish survival, but may if not addressed, pose possible serious threats to property, the fishery is in excellent health. The wild trout habitat could be further enhanced with the work illustrated

In order to achieve the required objectives of the Club of reducing the annual stocking of brown trout into the beat of the River Wharfe to nil and to ensure that the wild stocks are sufficient to withstand an annual crop to be harvested, it will be necessary to educate and convince Club members that for the first year or so they should not expect to be able to take many sizeable fish. Restraint on killing adult brown trout should be advised and that a policy of catch and release using barbless hooks should be encouraged. This, along with accurate record keeping of all fish which are caught and released, will enable the Committee and the Environment Agency Fisheries Officer to ascertain more accurately the growth of the wild trout population over that time.

It is essential, in my opinion, that accurate catch and release records are kept if a future management strategy is to be established which will achieve and maintain a higher standard in the quality of the wild trout fishing . Patience on behalf of the fishermen will be an important part of this process. It is also essential to allow ample time for the river to adjust to a non stocking policy and, in my opinion, the stocking of trout can only have an adverse impact on the resident stock of wild brown trout which, in my opinion, is of sufficient strength to support the requirements of club members . It is essential also that accurate records are kept of all trout caught and released. After two seasons of catch and release and the use of barbless hooks an indication of the size and quantity of the wild brown trout will have become more apparent. Monitoring of this project is paramount in conjunction with help and advice from Chris Wilcock - Fisheries Team Leader, Environment Agency.